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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002757

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, AND PM

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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ES](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: HONDURAS ANXIOUS TO MOVE EL SALVADOR BORDER
DEMARCATIION PROCESS FORWARD

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 2221

[1](#)B. PALMIERI/WAGNER EMAIL 11/17/03

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Palmieri;
reasons 1.5(B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As part of the on-going effort to demarcate the Honduran-El Salvador border, on November 11 OAS envoy, NIMA specialist John Gates, awarded over one square kilometer of territory to El Salvador that was originally designated to Honduras by the 1992 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision. Although the decision generated substantial press interest decrying the loss of national territory, the Government of Honduras (GOH) is far more concerned with moving the demarcation process forward as fast as possible. The GOH remains committed to honoring its international obligations and continues to view Gates as an honest broker, although Honduras believes Gates overstepped his bounds in his latest decision. While the GOH stands ready to implement Gates' decision, Honduras expects the same from any future revisions that negatively effect El Salvador. End Summary

[1](#)2. (C) As part of the on-going effort to demarcate the Honduran-El Salvador border, on November 11 OAS envoy, NIMA specialist John Gates, awarded over one square kilometer of territory to El Salvador that was originally designated to Honduras by the 1992 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision. The territory (Cerro El Pital) is centered around Cayaguanca, Ocotepeque and is one of the highest points in the area which is considered strategic by both sides. According to the GOH, Gates' decision to revise the ICJ's ruling was based on his feeling that placing the border marker atop El Pital, rather than another hilltop close by, made the border more congruous. The GOH, which was quite surprised by the decision, feels that Gates overstepped his authority by basing his revision on factors that were outside the boundaries of mere "technical discrepancies."

[1](#)3. (C) On November 19 FM Leonidas Rosa Bautista held a press conference in which he reiterated that the GOH remains committed to moving forward on the border demarcation process, even though it felt that Gates' decision was unsound. Rosa also indicated that the GOH had sent notice to the OAS stating its displeasure. Honduras will not, however, formally appeal Gates' assessment. Privately, Rosa told the Ambassador on November 21 that completing the border demarcation process was among the top priorities at the MFA. Rosa stated that completion would eliminate a long standing irritant and help foster greater regional integration.

[1](#)4. (C) On November 20, PolOff met with Miguel Tosta Appel, President of the Honduran Special El Salvador-Honduras Border Demarcation Commission, to discuss Gates' decision. Appel confirmed that Honduras will fully abide by its international commitments and obligation to accept Gates' decisions as final. However, he reiterated the GOH's concern that Gates over-stepped. Appel also stressed that the GOH expects El Salvador to move forthright on continuing to demarcate the border and expressed faith that El Salvador also would accept any changes made by Gates in the future that result in additional territory for Honduras.

[1](#)5. (C) Appel dismissed comments in the El Salvadoran press attributed to Coronel Raul Antonio Sandoval, representative of the Ministry of Defense assigned to the Commission, which criticized Gates as unrepresentative of the GOH's position. The press article was based on a memo COL Sandoval sent to the Commission that was subsequently leaked to the press. Appel reiterated the GOH's confidence in Gates' professionalism (ref A) and stated that the GOH was looking forward to moving ahead with the demarcation process as planned. Appel went on to say that COL Sandoval "has his own agenda."

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: While certainly not pleased with Gates' decision, the GOH is much more concerned with moving the process forward as quickly as possible. It is possible the GOH may jawbone Gates to soften him up on future decisions, especially if the press continues to cover the story in a negative fashion. However, according to the GOH, if El Salvador drags its feet in placing any of the other upcoming markers that Gates designates, especially if those markers

result in additional territory for Honduras, or El Salvador formally objects to a Gates decision, great harm could come to the entire process. Post believes that Honduras will react vigorously to any perceived Salvadoran delay on future demarcations. End Comment

Palmer